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SUBJECT: BUSHEHR TIMELINE: ATOMSTROYEXPORT PERSPECTIVE

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Bushehr reactor could be ready for initial start-up by the end of 2008 if there are no major supply or technical problems, Atomstroyexport representatives told the Embassy. Initial start-up would be followed by about four to five months of tests before the reactor (assuming the tests identify no serious problems) would be able to reach full power. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Embassy EST met January 11 with Leonid Yanko, Head of the Atomstroyexport External Affairs Division, his deputy, Dr. Alexey Ubeev, and the Director of Public Relations for Atomstroyexport, Irena Yesipova. Yanko confirmed that two of the eight fuel shipments to Bushehr had arrived and that the third would be delivered "soon." Total fuel shipments will amount to 82 metric tons. Yanko stated that the February 2008 time frame for completion of fuel assembly delivery was still achievable. He identified the absence of equipment, not fuel, as the major impediment to moving the Bushehr reactor toward initial start-up. A South Korean subcontractor, and perhaps other suppliers, were late in delivery of essential equipment.

¶3. (C) Yanko and Ubeev affirmed that, if the equipment arrives and pre-start-up checks go well, the Bushehr reactor could be ready for initial start-up by the end of 2008. Following start-up, the reactor would undergo months of intensive checks at intermediate power levels before it reached the 100 percent power level. Any failures or physical problems would delay the process. Yanko estimated that after criticality is achieved (enough fuel in the core to achieve a sustained nuclear reaction) it would take a minimum of four to five months before the reactor could be at full power. However, both he and Ubeev refused to offer any specific dates, stressing that any number of factors could result in delay.

¶4. (C) Yesipova underlined that the Bushehr reactor is incorporating previous elements from the earlier German construction. Checks will thus take longer, since this makes Bushehr a "pilot plant," without a proven design. For that reason, she too cautioned that estimates on start-up and the reaching of full power are especially precarious.
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